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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted at Miami-Dade Community College (MDCC) to assess the differences in the characteristics of students who failed two or more sections of the College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST) compared to students who passed all four sections of the test. A total of 302 students failed two or more sections of the June 1984 CLAST and from this group a sample of 136 transcripts was drawn for analysis. A total of 845 students passed all four sections of the CLAST test and from this group a systematic sample of 101 student transcripts was drawn. Data was gathered on ethnic membership, native language, cumulative grade point average (GPA), credits earned, age, basic skills scores, date of entry to MDCC, current campus, and gender. From student transcripts, data were gathered on enrollments in English as a Second Language (ESL) and/or developmental courses, number of course withdrawals, number of English and math courses taken, and average English and math grades. Study findings revealed: (1) the sample of failers was more likely to list a language other than English as their native language, to have taken at least one ESL course, and to be older than the sample of passers; (2) 84% of the students who passed the CLAST test had 5 or fewer course withdrawals while 34% of those who failed had more than 5 withdrawals; (3) over 85% of those who passed the CLAST had a GPA of 2.5 or better in contrast to 50% of the failers; and (4) 45% of those who failed the CLAST had enrolled in developmental reading, 64% in developmental writing, and 36% in developmental math compared to 4%, 9%, and 13%, respectively, of those who passed the CLAST. (HB)

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INITIAL TRANSCRIPT ANALYSIS FOR A SAMPLE OF STUDENTS WHO FAILED TWO OR MORE SECTIONS VERSUS A SAMPLE WHO PASSED ALL FOUR SECTIONS OF THE JUNE 1984 CLAST

Research Report No. 84-21

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Initial Transcript Analysis
For a Sample of Students Who Failed Two or More Sections
Versus a Sample Who Passed All Four Sections
Of the June 1984 CLAST

With each succeeding administration of the College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST), the performance of Miami-Dade students on this important test has received increased scrutiny. Starting in March, and again in June, the performance issue became critical since students had to pass at least three of the four sections in order to continue in the State University System (SUS) and pass all four sections in order to attain an A.A. degree, as of August 1, 1984.

The purpose of this study was to assess the differences between those students who failed two or more sections of the CLAST versus a sample who passed all four sections, with an emphasis on the characteristics that could be controlled or changed at the college level. Losak, Morris, and Leone's Research Report No. 83-21 was used as a springboard for the present study. In their study of the top 50 and bottom 50 scorers on each of the three multiple-choice sections of the CLAST, they found that the low scorers were more likely to:

* Score in the bottom quartile on the CGP subtests;
* Graduate from a foreign high school;
* Have Hispanic or black non-Hispanic background;
* Be older than the top 50 scorers;
* Enroll at M-DCC longer ago;
* Have lower GPA's;
* Take as many Reading and Writing credits as the top group but fewer Math credits;
* Attain lower grades in English, Social Science, and Humanities;
* Enroll in ESL and/or developmental courses.

This study used many of the same variables and several new ones. Questions dealing with specific courses and number of hours and grades in specific areas such as developmental and ESL were deferred until completion of a CLAST transcript file.

Methodology

A total of 302 students (21% of the first-time test takers) failed two or more sections of the June CLAST. From this group, a systematic sample of 136 transcripts were drawn for analysis. A total of 845 students passed all four sections of the June CLAST (58.5% of the first-time test takers). From this group a systematic sample of 101 student transcripts was drawn. From a previously existing file, data on the following variables were gathered: Ethnic membership, native language, cumulative grade point average, age, basic skills scores, date of first entry to Miami-Dade, credits earned, current campus, and gender. From the transcripts, data on the following variables were gathered: Enrollment in ESL and/or in developmental courses, number of course withdrawals, number of English and Math courses taken at Miami-Dade (excluding developmental courses and counting repeats of courses as part of the total), average English and Math grades (counting failures and repeats as part of the total).

Results

In terms of demographics, results were similar to the previous CLAST transcript study. The sample of failers was more likely than the sample of passers to list a language other than English as their native language, have taken at least one ESL course, and be older than the passers. In this analysis, the sample of passers had 48% who listed English as their native language, while only 31% of the failers did so. The failers' sample had 27% who had enrolled in at least one ESL course versus 4% of those who passed all four sections. By age, of those who passed, 63% were 21 or younger; only 40% of the failers fell in this age group. The sample of failers contained more black non-Hispanic students than did the sample of passers (23% versus 4%). The sample of passers had more white non-Hispanic students (31% versus 15%) and more Hispanics (64% versus 57%).

A new finding was that the number of withdrawals from courses related to passing or failing the CLAST. Table 1 shows the results for the two samples. While those who passed the CLAST were more likely to sail through their classes with five or fewer withdrawals, those who had failed accumulated on their transcripts as many as 22 withdrawals. This finding

probably indicated that students who failed CLAST were also having trouble with their courses and therefore withdrew from them more frequently than those who passed.

A number of students had not taken two or more English and Math courses prior to writing the CLAST. In English, 17% of the total sample had either none or only one English grade at Miami-Dade. Perusal of the transcripts showed that many of these students were currently enrolled in an English course but had not completed it prior to writing the CLAST. Even greater numbers had not completed two Math courses; 27 (12%) had completed no M-DCC Math courses while another 31 (13%) had completed only one. The differences were especially striking in Math between the passers and the failers. A total of 32% of those in the sample who failed the CLAST had either none or one Math course; this finding can be compared to the 15% who passed with none or one Math course. The full results can be found in Table 2.

Table 3 displays the average grade in English and Math for the sample when repeats and "F's" are considered as part of the grades in the two areas. In English, the sample of failers had attained surprisingly high grades; 49%, for example, had an average grade of "C". It appeared, therefore, when the average grade of those who failed versus those who passed was compared, that an English grade of "B" or better provided a better prediction of who will pass and fail the CLAST. In Math, sharper distinctions in grades were seen between passers and failers. Not unexpectedly, over 50% of those who failed had less than a "C" average in their Math courses. Only 15% of the passers had "D" or "F" averages, an indication that Math grades played an important role in CLAST performance. Compared to English grades, Math grades also seemed to be less inflated, perhaps because grading criteria are more distinct and involve attainment of one correct answer.

The cumulative grade point averages for the two samples provided yet another indication that those who passed the CLAST already had experienced more success in their studies, as opposed to those who failed. As shown by Table 4, over 85% of those who passed the CLAST had a grade point average of 2.5 or better in contrast to 50% of the failers. On the other hand, cumulative GPA was not a perfect predictor; 21% of the failers had grade point averages of 3.0 or above.

It was not surprising to find that the quartile in which a student scored in basic skills in Reading, Writing, or Math was related to whether they passed or failed the CLAST. It was surprising to find such a strong relationship when these two extreme samples were compared. Table 5 shows the results by quartile of the percentages who passed and failed the CLAST at each quartile. Note, for example, that of all students who scored above the 50th percentile in Reading, only 4% had failed two or more parts of CLAST. In addition, almost twice as many failers had no CGP scores as those who passed.

Since the CGP was first implemented in the Fall of 1980, the lack of a CGP score quite possibly related to date of enrollment at Miami-Dade. As shown by Table 6, more students who failed two or more sections of the CLAST had enrolled at Miami-Dade prior to the initiation of the CGP than had those who passed. In fact, one student first enrolled in Miami-Dade as long ago as the Fall of 1969, and two others enrolled in the Fall of 1971. Since different requirements were in effect then than now, it is not surprising that of those who failed CLAST only 49% had enrolled in the Fall of 1981 or later versus 64% of those who passed.

Since CGP scores showed such a strong relationship to CLAST performance, it was also not surprising to find that the proportion who enrolled in developmental Reading, Writing, and Math courses was higher for those who failed the CLAST than for those who passed. Table 7 indicates, for example, that for the sample who failed, 64% had enrolled in a developmental Writing course. Only 9% of the sample of passers had developmental Writing.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has shown that students who pass all four sections of the CLAST, as opposed to those who fail two or more sections, can be differentiated on several variables. In terms of college policy, some of the more significant indicators are the time of enrollment at Miami-Dade, the courses taken during the time at Miami-Dade, and the pattern of withdrawals from courses.

Even without an analysis of the transcripts, however, results have consistently shown that large numbers of students are being awarded

passing grades in their courses which do not reflect achievement of the minimum basic skills required by CLAST. Departmental, college-wide examinations would assure that all students enrolled in the same course had achieved minimal competence before a grade of "C" was awarded. The mid-level CLAST will also serve as a check on the attainment of competencies after the student has completed 30 hours. It is easier, however, to assess competence prior to awarding credit than it is to explain later that the credit was not a sufficient indication of competence and the student should be remediated.

Table 1

Number of Withdrawals for a Sample of CLAST Passers and Failers
June 1984 Administration

Withdrawals	Failed CLAST		Passed CLAST		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
0 - 5	89	66	85	84	174	74
6 - 10	34	25	12	12	46	19
11 - 15	6	4	4	4	10	4
16 +	7	5	0	0	7	3
Total	136	100	101	100	237	100

Table 2

Number of Courses in English and Math
Including Repeats and Failures for a Sample
of CLAST Passers and Failers
June 1984 Administrations

Number of Courses	Failed CLAST		Passed CLAST		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
English						
0	2	2	3	3	5	2
1	18	13	18	18	36	15
2	75	55	62	61	137	58
3	25	18	15	15	40	17
4 +	16	12	3	3	19	8
Total	136	100	101	100	237	100
Math						
0	23	17	4	4	27	12
1	20	15	11	11	31	13
2	33	24	41	40	74	31
3	30	22	23	23	53	22
4 +	30	22	22	22	52	22
Total	136	100	101	100	237	100

Table 3

Average Grade in English and Math Including Repeats and Failures
For a Sample of CLAST Passers and Failers
June 1984 Administration

	Failed CLAST		Passed CLAST		Total	
Grades	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
English						
A	11	8	31	30	42	18
B	27	20	33	33	60	25
C	66	49	27	27	93	39
D/F	32	24	10	10	42	18
Total	136	100	101	100	237	100
Math						
A	17	13	30	30	47	20
B	15	11	25	25	40	17
C	34	25	31	30	65	27
D/F	70	51	15	15	85	36
Total	136	100	101	100	237	100

Table 4

Cumulative Grade Point Average for a Sample
of CLAST Passers and Failers
June 1984 Administration

	Failed CLAST		Passed CLAST		Total	
GPA	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
0.0 - 1.99	7	5	1	1	8	3
2.0 - 2.49	61	45	13	13	74	31
2.5 - 2.99	40	29	36	35	76	32
3.0 - 3.49	21	16	31	31	52	22
3.5 - 4.00	7	5	20	20	27	12
Total	136	100	101	100	237	100

Table 5

Comparison of a Sample of CLAST Passers and Failers
on CGP Basic Skills Overall Scores
June 1984 Administration

	Percent Failed CLAST	Percent Passed CLAST	Number in Quartile	Percent of Total Group
CGP Reading				
Quartile 1	88	12	99	42
Quartile 2	36	64	33	14
Quartile 3	4	96	25	11
Quartile 4	4	96	27	11
CGP Writing				
Quartile 1	86	14	93	39
Quartile 2	45	55	40	17
Quartile 3	15	85	33	14
Quartile 4	0	100	20	8
CGP Math				
Quartile 1	82	18	49	21
Quartile 2	69	31	42	18
Quartile 3	41	59	39	16
Quartile 4	32	68	56	24
No CGP Scores	65	35	51	22

Table 6

Date of Enrollment for Sample of CLAST Passers and Failers
June 1984 Administration

	Failed CLAST		Passed CLAST		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Enrolled in 81-1 or later	67	49	65	64	132	56
Enrolled between 79-1 and 80-4	45	33	25	25	70	29
Enrolled prior to 79-1	24	18	11	11	35	15
Total	136	100	101	100	237	100

Table 7

Enrollment in Developmental Reading, Writing and Math Classes
For a Sample of CLAST Passers and Failers
June 1984 Administration

Enrolled Developmental	Failed CLAST		Passed CLAST		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Reading	61	45	4	4	65	27
Writing	87	64	9	9	96	41
Math	49	36	13	13	62	26
Total*	136	100	101	100	237	100

*Since some students took developmental courses in more than one area the numbers in the column will not equal the total number of students.